

# Using Buddhist Insights in Implementing Gross International Happiness

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## Introduction

Almost all training in leadership and management is geared to the acquisition of knowledge and practical skills. However, these skills only become effective if they are guided by the right intentions, which must be based on a correct understanding of the nature of reality. The triplet common to the Buddhist tradition I belong to – the Nyingmapa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism is: right view, right meditation, right action. Without right view of the nature of reality, one runs the risk of doing things that are contrary to the nature of reality, leading to poor performance for oneself and others.

A right view of reality means that right meditation/motivation will follow almost automatically. That motivation is to do as little harm as possible to others and to help others as much as possible. If work is guided by this conscious motivation, a decisive contribution to reaching good/responsible results is inevitable.

This approach corresponds to the story of what the Historical Buddha said when he was asked to give a summary of his teachings:

Do not commit any unwholesome actions,  
Cultivate a wealth of virtues,  
Train your mind, again and again and again....  
This is the Truth of the Buddha.

In management we often focus on external material aspects that appear to exist outside of ourselves, and which we then try to improve. But I have learned, particularly through a growing understanding of Buddhadharma and through experience, that it is much more effective first to adjust our thinking. This is a much easier way to change our experience of external situations, which is the object of our management and leadership.

We all create our own reality, because of our karmic thought patterns, by way of our karmic-formed senses and our karmic-formed preconceptions and conditioning and habitual patterns. Learning to think, speak and act in a dharmic way is a most effective management tool, which leads to wholesome results.

I want to offer you a number of tools that will help achieve better management and give life long management skills as well as life skills. I will discuss, from a management point of view, in the following order:

The ‘Seven Fundamental Qualities of Existence’: Learning to live in harmony with these leads to causing our selves and others as little harm as possible. Living contrary to these leads to negative/harmful results, which harm both our selves and others.

The ‘Six Paramitas’, or the transcendental practices of the Bodhisattvas, through which they realize the potential of all sentient beings: the attainment of Buddhahood. Training in the Paramitas leads to the attitude/motivation of putting the interests of others before our own, and to realize surplus values instead of profit maximization, so that correct/sustainable results are achieved.

Methods aimed at the direct training of our minds, so we gradually come to a direct experience of the absolute reality - the nature of mind. Practicing these methods further stimulates working in accordance with the previously mentioned areas of attention.

Teaching these methods derived from the Buddhadharma will help both Dharma practitioners and non-Dharma practitioners to become and remain responsible leaders.

Likewise, growing up in a Buddhist culture should almost naturally result in dharmic thinking and acting.

For this reason we can talk about the concept of Gross International Happiness, which is so important for the entire world and that is developed in the Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan. For non-Buddhists, learning about these insights may also be very helpful. It is not necessary to become a

Buddhist in a religious sense in order to be able to work with Buddhist insights and methods and try to attain Gross International Happiness.

Buddhism should never be about an 'ism', but about helping people discover their potential and realising it. It is important, therefore, both for people who grew up in a Buddhist culture and those who didn't to keep deepening the study and practice of these methods. This leads to a constantly renewed and nourishing understanding of the why and the how, and thus stabilises motivation. With deepening understanding, comes deepening motivation, and this results in better actions.

I think it's also of crucial importance to re-introduce Buddhist philosophy, logic and science in the educational system. Mind conditions matter. That's why intention/motivation is the decisive factor in reaching sustainable, wholesome results, also with respect to Gross International Happiness.

Now, at least in the West, the focus in business management lies in attaining the largest possible values for shareholders. This leads to an almost exclusive concern for attaining maximum profit, and less concern for people, the ecology etc. Consequently, a lot is going wrong.

The average Westerner pollutes his environment and himself – in a spiritual and physical sense-- much more than the average non-Westerner, resulting in an increase in physical and mental illnesses. More than 10 percent of all Westerners suffer from stress or burn out. This makes stress the most prevalent disease in the West, with corresponding costs higher than those caused by diseases like AIDS, malaria, polio, leprosy, etc. More than 10% of all Westerners need psychological aid.

It has been my experience that focusing on attaining the largest possible surplus value for one's clients, thereby giving space to the problem-solving abilities of employees, works significantly better. It involves fostering motivation rather than prescribing what should be done.

In all of the organisations I managed for at least two years, and which I often took over in very alarming conditions, disease rates dropped to less than half of the average for the respective branches of industry and productivity increased significantly. The result was that the profitability of these organisations also increased considerably, not because that was the goal, but because of an orientation toward the interests of clients and employees. This also contributed to increased happiness among the employees, who started to feel co-responsible for the functioning of the organisations.

When – as in the customary Western model – everyone places the focus on maximizing profits, it leads to murderous competition and possibly even to forms of warfare.

The model I champion leads to a compassionate society, in which each takes care of others. This is the logic of compassion.

Initially I used intuition in management. Later, after learning about the Buddhadharmā, I began to realize why my intuition had been correct. Buddha said in the Seven Fundamental Qualities of the Reality: do not commit any unwholesome actions. It is necessary that your actions are not contrary to 'The Seven Fundamental Qualities of Reality' as when they are, they actually violate reality. And that cannot but have harmful results.

There are two realities: the absolute reality and relative realities. There is only one absolute reality; while relative realities can exist in as many forms and interpretations as are – literally – conceivable. The absolute reality is the source from which everything that appears to exist in the relative realities derives, and to which it also returns, when the causes and conditions that made its existence possible, disappear. It is non-dual and can therefore not be described. But it can be experienced, if you are able to let go completely of every concept and expectation you have of it. We don't produce it, but non-conceptually experience the absolute reality in all its perfection. Absolute reality also appears when we die, as the ground luminosity, the clear, sourceless light, of which all religions speak.

The relative realities are the innumerable ways in which the absolute reality manifests itself to us, guided by our senses and our preconceptions and habits (i.e., karmic patterns). The relative realities are nameable, measurable, etc. and are the objects of the classical Western sciences. These take their departure, contrary to Buddhist science, from matter, and develop, by way of the natural sciences, into the current areas of science that are occupied with the functioning of the human mind. They do so primarily by investigating the functioning of the brain. However, the functioning of the brain is not the

same as the functioning of mind/consciousness. Consciousness always exists and is not dependent on matter.

Our brain and our heart are the antennae with which we as material beings make contact with consciousness/mind. The heart is the connection with the non-conceptual wisdom mind/consciousness, the brain the connection with conceptual mind/consciousness. In Buddhism, scientific development is exactly the reverse. The Buddha first occupied himself with the functioning of the human mind, thus followed the behavioral-scientific insights, and then came the insights into the nature of matter.

We live at a time which is opening up to Buddhist science, partly because Western science has come to realize increasingly that its approach cannot explain all phenomena, such as the first milliseconds of the Universe if it came into being after a primal explosion. My own contribution is actually evidence of this.

So what are the Fundamental Qualities of Reality? Everything that appears to exist in the relative realities, is subject to change and therefore impermanent. Is this a disaster? No, because if reality wasn't subject to change it could also not be improved. And that would make leadership/management impossible.

However, we tend to see relative reality as static, and so we try to base our security on this. The way we experience the relative realities, this grasping of this wrong view, is the cause of the quality of *dhukha*/frustration/suffering. This is the second of the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha. Good leadership makes use of the quality of change-ability by trying to guide it in a way that is not harmful. Perhaps you've seen athletic competitions on TV, where the strong men must move a stationary truck across a certain distance. What is the hardest part in their effort? Getting the truck to move. For, once it's moving, keeping it moving and pulling it across the finish line is easy, compared to starting the movement.

In our work as leaders and managers we are blessed to work with a reality in which everything is constantly changing. The important thing is to give the right direction to the changes taking place. This responsible leadership focuses more on the intention behind changes than on grasping to what appears to enjoy permanent existence.

Next we can observe that in the relative realities everything is connected to everything else – mutual interdependency. Relative realities are ways by which the absolute reality manifests itself to us. Guided by our senses and our preconceptions and habitual patterns, we can recognize that everything that appears to exist is mutually interdependent. In perception the perceiver, the perception and the perceived are interdependent; in essence, they are one. Moreover, if we analyze where we experience the apparent existence of realities, we have to conclude that this experience takes place in our consciousness and not outside of us.

The law of cause and effect (*karma*) is the law that determines the relationship among all things that appear to exist in the relative realities – change-ability and mutual interdependency. Phenomena only exist if there are causes and conditions for them. If those causes and conditions change or disappear, the phenomena also change or disappear. However, every action causes reactions, which in turn cause other reactions. In this way, an entire system of mutually conditioning actions and reactions is created, which together form the relative realities. This is what makes it practically impossible to determine which actions and circumstances cause certain phenomena to manifest.

Within this karmic system the following principles can be distinguished (according to Dagpo Rinpoche):

- all actions of body, speech and mind have corresponding effects;
- the effects of an action increase exponentially in time;
- one cannot suffer the effects of an action one did not perform; and
- when an action has been performed, the effects of that action are inevitable.

Furthermore, there are four stages in the development of *karma*:

- to cause *karma*, a relationship between a subject and an object, is required;
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- conditioning thoughts of the subject with respect to the object are required, in which three aspects can be distinguished- motivation/intention behind the thoughts, disturbing emotion belonging to the thoughts, and an identification by the subject with the object;
- the beginning of the action; and
- the completion of the action.

Every action can have one of three kinds of results:

- complete maturation, which means the effects are greater than the cause;
- effects consistent with the cause; and
- effects regarding the situation, which means causes leading to circumstances that are of the same kind as the cause.

Many possible situations create problematic as well as favorable circumstances. They may be the result of causes, which cannot be directly linked to previous actions of the person in question. But that they meet those circumstances is always the result of their previous actions, either in this or in past lives. This is the reason why everyone is always co-responsible for what he or she experiences. There is a saying, which is attributed to Guru Rinpoche: 'how you are now is a result of how you used to be; how your future will be is caused by how you are now.' This demonstrates the passive and active aspect of karma. The passive aspect is how you ended up in your present situation; the active aspect is that you always have the possibility in the here and now to take responsibility for your situation and therefore to work on improving the circumstances you and others will later encounter. Familiarity with these principles of karma is of crucial importance for good leadership. Moreover, it's possible to train ourselves in working with karma in a responsible way.

When we speak of absolute reality, we know that it is devoid of concepts. A concept is a combination of a form coupled with an attribution of values, both from a subject towards an object. Absolute reality, however, is non-dual and there are in essence no permanent, independent concepts. A consequence of this quality of absolute reality is that holding onto concepts in the relative realities is, in principle, a harmful action.

From this insight we understand that it is not the law that creates justice, but its application. Precepts and prohibitions that have to be performed without knowledge of the underlying insights and values may negatively affect the quality of the realities.

Bureaucracy, from this perspective, is something to be avoided as much as possible as it denies the emptiness of reality and creates an anonymous injustice because it takes individual responsibility away from people and defers it to dead rules.

Another quality of absolute reality is that it has the potential to give rise to all that is conceivable by means of identification by an apparent subject with a thought that occurs, motivated to do so in one way or another. This again underlines the importance of right intention in the (self-) creative process of the relative realities. Finally I want to mention two other qualities of absolute reality, namely compassion and (non-conceptual) wisdom / prajna. These are often compared to the two qualities of the sun: warmth (compassion) and light (wisdom). Both these qualities form the basis of the quality of potential.

Wisdom translates itself in the way in which each (self-creative) process moves from an always present implicit order in the absolute reality, to a temporary explicit order in the relative realities. One may think in this context of 'The Twelve Links of the Chain of Coming into Existence in Mutual Interdependency' / the Pratitya Samutpada / the 12 Nidanas of the Buddha, or David Bohm's Theory of the Implicit and Explicit Order, which theory lies at the basis of the current development of modern Western science. HH the Dalai Lama regards David Bohm as his science teacher.

The Theory of the Implicit and Explicit Order states that there is an absolute primal state of energy, which, through causes and circumstances, can unfold into an explicit order, the manifestation. That happens according to patterns that are implicitly and non-conceptually contained in the primal state. When the causes and circumstances of the manifestation disappear, the manifestation folds again, by a

reversal of the unfolding process, into the primal state. The Pratitya Samutpada and the Theory of Implicit and Explicit Order are compatible. Compassion translates itself in the relative realities in the possibility that apparently independent phenomena can assume temporary relationships. We experience non-conceptual wisdom through intuition.

Taking into account the Seven Fundamental Qualities of Existence primarily serves to keep you from causing harm by means of your actions, particularly in your role as leader. This is working on the foundation of responsible leadership.

Buddhism has a marvelous, and at the same time, practical system to give a concrete meaning to 'cultivating a wealth of virtues'. These are the Six Paramitas, the exercises of the Bodhisattvas by which they transform their relative habitual state of mind into the enlightened state of mind – Buddhahood.

The Six Paramitas are:

**Generosity.** This is the practice of giving space to your self and others. It is also receiving without attachment, so that you can also renounce again what you receive without having disturbing emotions. It is putting your self in the service of others. Aiming in your work to supply your clients with surplus value and giving space to your employees to realize business goals in their own way are ways of applying this paramita to responsible leadership.

In the early seventies, I was chief editor and publisher of Holland's leading agrarian trade magazine. Agriculture at the time was going through a period of expansion, from ongoing mechanization. Because most agrarian businesses were mixed, expansion could only take place through specialization. The formula of our magazine, however, was to pay attention to all facets of agriculture. We realized that our formula no longer corresponded to the needs of our readers. To test the development of a new formula, we first launched a specialized trade magazine for pig farmers. When it turned out that it met the needs of the specialized pig farmers, we subsequently adjusted the entire formula of the magazine. We published the main magazine with general information for farmers and other rural residents, and a number of technical supplements for arable farming, cattle farming, pig farming, poultry farming, and later also for horse and sheep farming. This way the reader could choose an information package, which met his specific needs and pay a suitable price for it.

The same was true for advertisers. With the old formula, there was only one magazine in which to place ads, and they paid for that part of the circulation destined for readers for whom their products and services held no interest. The new formula allowed them to choose between advertising in the main magazine or in one or more of the supplements. In spite of the fact that we had to expand our editorial staff to implement these changes and our production costs went up, the result was that in one year we doubled our turnover and profits went up fourfold. Success came because we hadn't based our operation on cost analyses and profit maximization, but on the changing information needs of our readers and changing communication needs of advertisers, and tried to give them a larger surplus value, geared toward their particular needs.

**Discipline.** This an attitude in which you don't act based on rules and precepts, but train yourself in every specific situation to do that which is the best response to that situation, especially ethically. It is also eliminating harmful actions and striving to perform virtuous actions of body, speech and mind. The goal is to never have to feel ashamed, and to have a willingness to always be held accountable.

The example about the re-launch of the magazine also has many aspects that have to do with this paramita.

**Patience.** This means not to get discouraged in the absence of success and when facing obstacles, persevering in your good intentions, trusting that if you keep at it, eventually you'll achieve positive results.

In this context the insight that obstacles are not primarily caused by external circumstances, but are the result of your previous negative actions of body, speech and mind, is helpful. The more negative they were, the longer it takes before the circumstances they gave rise to can be changed. Because you understand you are the cause of the obstacles, you realize that you also have to solve them, however long it may take.

Exertion. This is the practice of the attitude to always be inspired and inspiring. All of the paramitas follow one another, by the way, so it is actually a deepening of the paramita patience. It means always taking responsibility for yourself and your actions, and not hiding behind excuses.

Meditation/Concentration. This is the practice of an attitude to always maintain a certain distance with respect to yourself, allowing you to supervise your actions of body, speech and mind, also by checking and correcting your motivation behind them. It is also an attitude of only doing that which you have chosen at that moment and not letting yourself be distracted by other thoughts and emotions that may occur to you.

The first five paramitas are aspects of compassion and therefore of right action. The sixth paramita is:

Wisdom. This is the development of an attitude of being able to listen and understand, and of reflection and contemplation. It is, above all, developing a distance from dominating and conditioning thoughts and giving space to intuition. Intuition is the way in which the inherent wisdom of absolute reality in your heart can be nourished and then be converted in your brain into concepts that allow you to communicate this inherent wisdom in the relative realities.

Wisdom in Sanskrit is called *prajna*. In that word there are two roots: *pra* and *jna*, corresponding to the concepts 'pre' and 'conceptual knowledge'. So *prajna* is the inherent non-conceptual knowledge, the pure ground in absolute reality from which the conceptual knowledge of the relative realities is derived.

Practicing the Six Paramitas is working on the second component of responsible leadership. It teaches to use inherent wisdom, translated into practical/ right action, to plant wholesome causes and conditions, which will later lead to wholesome results.

Training yourself to live the Seven Fundamental Qualities of Existence and the Six Paramitas is already a form of 'training the mind, again and again and again...' It is a matter of practice in the relative realities with the methods belonging to them. But by keeping up this practice, your relative, conditioned, habitual mind transforms itself more and more into its absolute original state of wisdom.

Other forms of practices, which work directly with the mind, can reinforce this. Shamatha meditation, orienting the mind inward, letting go and relaxing, is one of these. By practicing meditation you become an expert in your, mostly negative, ego-directed habitual patterns. It gradually enables you to recognize and let go of them in the state of non-meditation/ daily life. The result is gradual acceptance of oneself and openness, which offers space to compassion to manifest itself in a natural way. This can then be followed up with compassion practices. First generating the inspiration to act with compassion, we have the Four Immeasurables:

- Boundless love, as antidote to aggression
- Boundless compassion, as antidote to passion
- Boundless sharing love, as antidote to jealousy
- Boundless equanimity, as antidote to indifference

### Concluding Remarks

I hope my contribution will have demonstrated that the Buddhadharma comprises many insights and methods that can contribute significantly to responsible leadership; that it is more important and effective to work on our spiritual and mental capacities than on learning and working with methods that are not based on the right view and right motivation; and that working from the right insights into the true nature of reality, guided by a right motivation/attitude – partly through practicing the Six Paramitas – is the most effective way in to achieve good and sustainable results with our leadership and management. This is also the deeper purpose of working with the concept Gross International Happiness.